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ABSTRACT

A study determined employer perceptions of single parents/displaced homemakers' skills after receiving training through special training centers across Kentucky. Centers were funded through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act. Employer perceptions of single parents/displaced homemakers in comparison to other employees was also investigated. Attention was also given to identifying transitional characteristics as this population moved from training to employment. A literature review focused on employer expectations regarding employee skills. Data were collected through a written survey and interviews with 99 Kentucky employers who had hired single parents/displaced homemakers during the past 2 years. Employers rated the single parent/displaced homemaker graduates as having the necessary skills to perform their job duties well. As a whole, these employees were able to make appropriate transitions from an unpaid working status to paid employment. Employers did not view the single parent/displaced homemaker as any different than other employees who had been hired. In written survey results, employers spoke more highly of worker characteristics such as attitude, motivation, and flexibility than of actual job skills of these employees. In qualitative interviews, employers listed worker characteristics more often as strengths than job skills. (Appendixes include a list of 13 references, correspondence, survey, interview schedule, and 3 tables.) (YLB)

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Employer Perceptions of Single Parent/Homemakers' Skills

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to obtain employers' perceptions of single parent/homemakers' skills after training. Centers funded through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act throughout the state of Kentucky provide both skill and career development training for this population. In addition, employers' perceptions of single parent/homemakers in comparison to other employees was investigated. Attention was also given to identifying transitional characteristics as this population moved from training to employment. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered to reflect employers' perceptions. The research tools included a written survey and one-on-one interviews with employers throughout the state. Ninety-nine employers who had hired single parent/homemakers in the past two years participated in this research study. Findings will be of particular interest to project directors and other educators involved in training programs throughout the Commonwealth.

Introduction

The research was conducted from July 1, 1989, through June 30, 1990, by the ReEntry Center, Northern Kentucky University (NKU), Highland Heights, Kentucky 41076. Funding for the research was provided under project number KRS 12-33-540-DCDF-E432-50-03-04-G2800-4819-0541-90-24-V56 through a grant from the Office of Vocational Education, Kentucky Department of Education, Frankfort, Kentucky.

Purpose of the Research

The research was undertaken to determine employers' perceptions of single parent/homemakers' skills after receiving training through single parent/homemaker training centers across the state of Kentucky. These centers are funded by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act. The research was conducted for a two-fold purpose. First, it is expected that the data from this research will be useful in improving the quality of training at the single parent/homemaker centers. Second, the study provided positive visibility to the centers as employers were surveyed and interviewed to obtain necessary information about the training. This direct contact with employers represented training centers' interest in the quality of training provided and the work performance of single parent/homemaker graduates.

Primary Objectives

Data were collected through a written survey and one-on-one interviews with employers throughout the state of Kentucky who have hired single parent/homemakers during the past two years. The research focused primarily on the following objectives:

1) Employers' perceptions of the job skills and worker characteristics of single parent/homemakers after completing training and becoming employed.

2) Identification of transitional characteristics as single parent/homemakers moved from training into employment.

3) Employers' perceptions of single parent/homemakers in comparison to other employees.

The findings from the Employer Survey and the qualitative interviews with employers are presented in this report. In addition, results from the qualitative interviews are presented state-wide and by site in an effort to give centers an overview of training, as well as specific information regarding the quality of their training.

Limitations of the Research

The limitations of the study are addressed to provide the reader with a better understanding of the research procedures. It was not anticipated that past single parent/homemaker participants would need to provide their written permission before employers could be contacted. When asking center directors to provide the participant information in an effort to contact single parent/homemakers for permission, it was determined that legally, the center directors could only provide the name and address of the past participant. In order to protect the past participants' anonymity concerning age, marital status and race, the researchers felt that this was ethical and correct. This gave the psychologist limited information to use as points of comparison when the survey results were returned. Although this was a limiting element in the research, it was considered to be a necessary one by the Equal Vocational Education Program Director and the researchers.

Further, the past participants were sent a letter from the NKU ReEntry Center asking for their permission to contact their employers; and this is discussed further in the report. However, after the first mailing, it was determined that a second mailing was necessary. Therefore, past participants were given two opportunities to return their permission forms. The researchers discussed possible reasons why past participants may not have chosen to return their forms in the report.

Literature Review

Employers' perceptions of training programs and the expected work performance of employees is of great interest to educators throughout the country. As the labor market becomes more competitive, educators are faced with the challenge of preparing students with job skills which are marketable and easily transferable from the training site to the workplace. Educators also know that employers seek to hire employees who possess strong basic skills which are necessary in any employment situation. Employers consistently expect employees to possess strong academic skills, good interpersonal skills, and the ability to make decisions and solve problems (Johnston & Packer, 1987).

The American Society for Training and Development, and the U.S. Department of Labor (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1988) have conducted a joint research project to determine the basic skills that employers expect of today's employees. The following list of skills encompasses employers' expectations:

Organizational Effectiveness/Leadership

Interpersonal/Negotiation/Teamwork

Self-Esteem/Goal Setting/Motivation/Personal and Career Development

Creative Thinking/Problem Solving

Communication: Listening and Oral Communication

3 R's (Reading, Writing, Computation)

Learning to Learn

Employers consider organizational effectiveness and leadership to be at the top of their lists concerning their expectations of employees. They want workers who can assume responsibility and possibly motivate other employees should the need arise. They seek employees who have a picture of the total

operation of the company or business and who believe in the work which is being performed.

The need for teamwork is repeatedly stressed; and employers want employees who not only treat the customer well, but also work well with the other employees. Team effort is an important part of producing quality work, and employers stress the need for interpersonal skills which enhance employee communications.

Good self-esteem is an important employee trait which is listed as a basic requirement for employees. Employers want employees who have goals and possess motivation to move forward with their careers. Personal and career development are required if the employee plans to move ahead with the company and be an asset while doing so.

Creative thinking and problem solving are required of employees. Employers want employees who can "think on their feet" and who can arrive at solutions which are effective in solving problems.

Communication skills are stressed by all employers when asked what skills are necessary in the workplace. The skills of listening and speaking are crucial for dealing with the public and working with others in the workplace.

Reading, writing and math computation also constitute what employers call the 3 R's. Employers cite these needs as necessary in any employment setting and stress that most of today's applicants are seriously lacking in this area. Many adult educators are faced with the challenge of providing academic remediation in an effort to help the adult "catch-up" in the areas of reading, writing and math computation.

Overall, employers are seeking employees who have the potential to learn. Many employers have stated that if the employee has had basic training in the academic areas of reading, writing, and math and also job-keeping skills, they can train them to do the specific functions of the job. When the employee has participated in a training program which promotes the characteristics listed above, the stage is set for further learning on the job. Therefore, the primary goal of training programs is to be ever cognizant of employers' needs and to maintain training which is directly applicable to the workforce.

In an effort to maintain training programs which reflect employers' needs, many state vocational education programs and colleges have been involved in research projects which have provided information concerning employers' perceptions of training and their expectations of employees once hired ("Vocational Education and JTPA," 1989); (Clagett, Prince George's, 1988); (Hollenbeck, 1987); ("What employers say," 1986). These research projects have provided direct information for educators and have allowed them to enhance the quality of their job training as they strive to meet the ever-increasing demands of the workplace.

Findings from these studies and others which were more directly related to specific skill areas such as secretarial skill training programs (Gaustad, 1988; Ascher, 1988; Mott, 1988; Redmann, 1988) have reflected the same necessary worker characteristics which employers seek in their future employees. Employers consistently stressed the need for interpersonal communication which is necessary in working with the public/customer and with other employees within the work setting. Another frequently cited need was a positive attitude when dealing with the public, other workers or supervisors. Many employers requested employees who were enthusiastic, responsible, cooperative and willing to learn. Other worker characteristics

requested were the communication skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. These skills, which are often labeled as basic skills, are primarily the ones requested by employers.

Although these worker characteristics were generated from specific geographic areas, they are very much like those listed by the American Society of Training and Development and the U.S. Department of Labor which reflected a national sampling of employers. Since it is now known through these studies that employers are consistently requesting these worker characteristics, educators of single parent/homemakers need to know if these students actually possess these traits after completion of training; and employers can provide that information. This study seeks to obtain employers' perceptions of single parent/homemakers' skills on the job.

Method

The Survey

Subjects & Procedures

The survey respondents were 68 employers (employers were asked to have the employee's immediate supervisor complete the survey. For clarity, "Employers" will be used throughout this summary to describe respondents.) who completed a questionnaire about an employee whom they had hired from a single parent/homemaker program. To obtain these employers, directors of single parent/homemaker programs around the state were contacted (See Appendix A) and asked to send names and addresses of all program participants who had been placed in jobs during the past two years. Ten project directors sent names and addresses of 345 past participants (See Appendix B). Letters were then sent to these 345 individuals asking for permission to contact the employer who had first hired them after their participation in the single parent/homemaker program (See Appendix C).

The letter explained the purpose of the project and gave assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Ninety-nine of the 345 responded, representing a return rate of 28.7%. Of these, 87 gave permission for their employer to be surveyed, representing a useable return rate of 25.2%. Included in the "non-returns" were a number of participants whom were never contacted due to incorrect addresses. Letters, copies of the signed permission slips, and surveys were then mailed to 87 employers (See Appendix D); 68 of these 87 surveys were returned. The return rate for the surveys actually mailed was 78.1%, although surveys were only completed on 19.7% of the original sample.

The Survey Instrument

The survey was intentionally kept short (See Appendix E), as it was felt that the employers would respond more carefully if the number of questions was not excessive. The first page contained questions on company size and type, whether the employee still worked there, and if not, how many months the person had been employed. The employers were also asked if the employee had received either a raise or a promotion.

On the second page, the survey respondents were asked to evaluate the employee on 21 work-related characteristics (dependability, attitude toward the job, quality of work, etc.) Specifically, they were asked to compare other employees they had hired to do the same or similar work to the employee they hired from the single parent/homemaker program and rate them "better than average," "average," or "worse than average."

Questions about the employee's resume and interview were asked on the last page. Both of these items were followed by open-ended questions about how the resume and interview could have been improved.

Another open-ended question asked how the employee could have been better prepared for the job, and another yes/no question asked respondents whether they would hire a person from the single parent/homemaker training program again. A final question asked what other comments the respondents had.

Qualitative Interviews

Subjects and Procedures

The subjects for the qualitative interviews were 30 employers who had hired at least one employee from a single parent/homemaker center in the past two years. Fifteen of the employers were white females, fourteen were white males and one was a male minority. Five employees were selected by project directors from six training sites across the state. These sites were selected to provide a representation of rural as well as urban areas and to represent different geographic areas of the state. The six sites were Ashland, Kentucky; Henderson, Kentucky; Hopkinsville, Kentucky; Maysville, Kentucky; Greater Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky; and Owensboro, Kentucky. Fifteen of the employers were from privately owned companies and fifteen were from publicly operated agencies or facilities. A researcher spent one day per site interviewing the employers at their places of business and audio tapes were made of each interview.

The Interview Questions

The ten questions (see Appendix F) were designed to gather qualitative data which could not be obtained through a written survey. These ten questions were used to gain information regarding the single parent/homemakers' skills, worker characteristics such as attitude,

interpersonal skills and communication skills, and to identify any problem areas such as child care, transportation or tardiness. Questions were also asked to determine employers' perceptions of the training centers and if there were any expectations of employee problems prior to hiring based on information received from the training center regarding the single parent/homemaker. Finally, the employers were asked for suggestions concerning ways to improve the training programs to meet employers' needs.

Results

The Survey

Data from the surveys were coded and entered into a VAX mainframe computer. Frequencies were calculated, and statistical analyses were done where appropriate. Response frequencies for the questions asked on page one of the survey are shown in Table 1. Almost three quarters of the participants had initially gone to work for privately owned and operated agencies, and these organizations tended to be either small (less than 25 employees) or large (over 100 employees) rather than mid-sized. Nearly three-quarters of the participants, 73.5%, still worked for the employer who had initially hired them. The remaining 26.5% had worked for the initial employer for an average of 9.9 months. When asked why these employees were no longer working there, "quit" was the most frequently checked reason (56.3%), followed by "hired only on a temporary basis" (25%).

Since coming to the company, 29.2% of the employees had been promoted, and 78.8% had received a raise. Further analysis showed that receipt of a raise was related to the type of agency for which the

employee worked (χ^2=7.73, p <.005). Of those who worked for privately owned and operated organizations, 87.2% had received raises and 12.8% had not. Of those who worked for government funded and operated agencies, 55.6% had received a raise and 44% had not.

For the comparative ratings on page two of the survey, response frequencies were tabulated for the three catagories. These are presented in Table 2. As shown in the table, ratings tended to be high, with most survey respondents checking "better than average" or "average" for almost all of the variables. The most positive ratings were on the items attitude toward the job, appearance, cooperativeness, and punctuality. The least positive ratings were on the items written expression, prior skills and training, and oral expression. It should be noted, however, that these less positive ratings were not negative; they were just closer to "average" than "better than average." Only on the items ability to handle constructive criticism, absenteeism, and emotional maturity and stability were more than 10% of the ratings "worse than average."

Further analysis showed that there were differences in the ratings made of employees who were still working for the organization versus those who were not. In general, the ratings of the latter tended to be more negative. Significant differences in the ratings were found for the variables attitude toward the job (χ^2=11.02, p <.004) ability to learn (χ^2=8.41, p <.02), cooperativeness (χ^2=6.85, p <.03), ability to handle constructive criticism (χ^2=8.49, p <.01), ability to get along with supervisor (χ^2=7.8, p <.02), ability to get along with other employees (χ^2=8.61, p <.01), written expression (χ^2=8.94, p <.01),

listening ability (χ^2=7.73, p <.020, quality of work (χ^2=10.52, p <.005), tact (χ^2=6.68, p <.04), emotional maturity, stability (χ^2=8.88, p <.01), initiative (χ^2=16.68, p <.0001), and responsibility (χ^2=19.15, p <.0001). Table 3 shows comparative evaluations by employees status for five of these variables. It can be seen that program participants who were still employed with the organization that originally hired them elicited more "better than average" ratings and elicited fewer "worse than average" ratings.

Page three contained the questions about the resume and the interview. Eleven respondents did not answer the questions about the resume. Of the 57 who did, 70.2% rated the resume as "average" and 29.8%, as "better than average." No one answered "worse than average." Only 12 people wrote in suggestions for improving the resumes, and there was no single theme in these comments.

Seventeen respondents wrote in comments about how the interview could have been improved, and here there was a strong theme: eight of the comments mentioned the interviewee's nervousness and/or lack of confidence. Nevertheless, 41.9% of the interviews were rated as "better than average," and 56.5% were rated as "average." Only one (1.6%) interview was judged to be "worse than average."

Thirty-one employers responded to the question about how the employee could have been better prepared for the job. Improved typing and computer skills were the most frequent response to this question. A few other responses mentioned better communication skills and more skills and knowledge related to a specific setting (e.g., legal, hospital). Several responses indicated that the employees came to the jobs very well prepared.

Of the 65 employers who answered the question about whether they would hire a person from the single parent/homemaker program again, all but one answered "yes." Twenty-two employers offered additional comments; 18 of these remarks included positive statements about either the employees or the single parent/homemaker programs.

Qualitative Interviews

The results from the qualitative interviews are provided statewide and then by site in an effort to give more specific information for training centers.

When employers were asked what they knew about training programs for single parent/homemakers, all but two responded that they knew very little about these types of training programs. Most of the employers mentioned the director's name of the training center as their primary contact person and had no specific information regarding types of training taking place at the centers. Fifty percent of the employers had contacted the program directly upon learning about the services from friends or other employers. In fifty percent of the cases, the center director had contacted the employer when an opening was publicly advertised and inquired about the possibility of filling the position with a single parent/homemaker. Four of the employers had served as guest speakers or conducted mock interviews at the centers and this had provided further information. Two of the centers had held open houses for the public to come and learn more about the services of the center, and two employers had attended these.

Employers were asked if they needed more or better information about the employee before hiring in an effort to help the employee make a

smoother transition into the position. Twenty five of the employers noted that they did not need more information regarding the employee before hiring. Many of these 25 employers noted that the center director had provided adequate information about the employee before hiring. Two employers noted that they needed more information. Three employers made the point that the term "displaced homemaker" had caused them to have a negative mental picture of the applicant before hiring. They emphasized they had found this negative image unwarranted.

The employers were asked if the employees had experienced any transitional problems as they moved from their training into employment. The responses were very brief and to the point. Twenty employers reported that the employee had no difficulties in transition. Four employers reported these employees had no more problems than other employees and these were not significant. Six employers reported that these employees had had problems such as excessive absences or too many personal phone calls. The noted problems were resolved.

When asked if the employer had seen the single parent/homemaker employee as any different from other employees, either in skills or attitudes, the employers provided very specific information regarding the differences. First, 19 of the employers noted that there was no difference between this employee and other employees. Eleven of the employers reported that there were differences between single parent/homemaker employees and other employees who had not been trained in centers for this population. The differences are comprised in the following list:

Positive differences:

better trained

more conscientious

more mature and life experiences were a plus

attitude concerning work was excellent

training provided a better basis from which to work

had more initiative than other employees

eager to have job security

greater desire to work

had experienced life transitions and could make better decisions

clerical skills were excellent

employer admired them more than other employees

Negative differences:

lack of concentration

not as self-assured

Employers were asked if the employee had experienced any child care or transportation problems. Twenty one employers reported that the employee had no child care or transportation problems. Eight reported that there were problems initially, but the employer and employee had worked through the problems until they were resolved. One employer reported that the problems were no more significant than those of other employees. Specifically, four employers of the eight who reported problems, cited problems with old cars as the source of difficulty. Two employers had recommended that their employees seek counseling for difficulties with children and had helped the employees acquire counseling. The problems have since been resolved.

When asked about the strengths of the employees who had been hired, the employers had many words of praise. The strengths were reflected in two areas: those which constituted specific job skills and those which reflected worker characteristics and could apply to any type of employment.

Specific job skills included:

good filing	math proficiency
good clerical skills	good word processing skills
phone proficiency	good bookkeeping skills
good handwriting	good memory

Worker characteristics included:

well-motivated	eager to learn
honest	good attitude
mature	hard working
willingness to learn	appreciative of opportunity
independent	straightforward
nurturing	compassionate
concerned	cooperative
asks good questions	good work attitudes
stays busy	dependable
takes directions well	flexible
creative	ready for a challenge
dedicated	very conscientious
always ahead of schedule	accurate
thorough	professional dress
neat	polite

outgoing	calm
confident	teamworker
good rapport with others	anticipated job duties

Employers were then asked to discuss the skill sufficiency of the new employee.

When asked if the skills of the single parent/homemaker were sufficient, 17 employers responded yes, while 13 responded no. Deficiency areas named included industry specific information: knowledge of specific word processing/software packages, knowledge of types and brands of paint, experience and knowledge concerning broadcasting, training on microform machines, making change in retail clerk position, accounting expertise and improvement in spelling. Worker characteristics which could be improved included: additional phone work, organizational skills, motivation and attitude, decision making, self-confidence and interpersonal skills.

The employers were also asked if they provided any formal orientation to the job upon hiring the employee. Fifteen employers stated that an orientation was provided which included some structured training and fifteen employers reported that no orientation or job training was provided upon employment. The types of orientation or training provided offered extended from one hour to four weeks in duration. At one job site, employees were sent to Frankfort for one week of training. Another employer used a mentoring system which coupled the new employee with a "buddy" who knew the operations and would offer assistance to the new employee as needed. Of the employers reporting that some training was provided, some included directives concerning how work was performed; and some employers also offered

adequate time for observation of work which would ultimately be the responsibility of the new employee.

Employers were specifically asked if they expected any problems, or did they in fact, experience any problems with the new employee related to the employee's background. Three employers reported that they expected some type of problem because of the personal problems that the potential employee had experienced. One of these employers had anticipated problems due to the fact that the employee had young children. Out of the 27 employers who had not expected problems, one reported that he had had very positive expectations that the person would be more conscientious and that had been the case upon working with the employee.

The last question the employers were asked was to offer suggestions on ways to improve the quality of training currently being offered at training centers. The employers had many positive responses. These suggestions are provided in two categories:

Job Skills:

more computer training (four respondents)

longer time spent on actual work skills

more word processing training

more emphasis on typing

training in handwriting

how to read computer manuals

training in notetaking

training in basic skills such as math and spelling

Worker Characteristics (applicable to any type of employment):

interviewing skills (two respondents)

dress more appropriately for work (three respondents)

communication skills (three respondents)

assertiveness training

organizational skills

priority setting

teamwork

discipline

socialization skills (two respondents)

interpersonal skills

self-confidence (three respondents)

dependability

problem solving

understanding business environment

punctuality

better child care arrangements

better health care before obtaining employment

willingness to learn

listening skills

good work habits

conflict management

keep personal life separate from work life

do not bring personal life problems to work

work is a place to earn a living--not get support

The last three items in this category are listed individually to fully reflect the specific words of the employers.

Qualitative Interviews by Site

The following results of the qualitative interviews are provided by site to assist project directors in garnering an understanding of the differences and similarities of training throughout the state.

Ashland, Kentucky - The employers in Ashland had hired single parent/homemakers to perform the following jobs: clerk typist/loan processor, secretary/bookkeeper, file clerk/bookkeeper, library clerk, and legal secretary. All of the employers spoke highly of the center and its students. They were consistent in their request for maturity, self-confidence and communication skills as necessary skills for their specific employment needs. All of the employers listed worker characteristics such as conscientiousness, flexibility and organizational skills when discussing the employees' strengths. When asked what skills were needed by the employee, the employers listed the following: self-confidence, typing, dictation, math skills and typing accuracy. There was also a request for more computer skills. Three employers out of the five stated the skills were appropriate to the needs of the jobs.

Henderson, Kentucky - The employers in Henderson had hired single parent/homemakers to perform the following jobs: retail counter sales, assistant manager, unit secretary/receptionist, office assistant/filing clerk and office manager. Three of the employers noted the need for employees to dress professionally. Three of them also mentioned the need for more instruction on interpersonal skills. There was also a requested need for assertiveness and problem solving instruction. The strengths mentioned by employers included: flexibility, listening skills, initiative, good telephone skills, creativity and good memory. The employers commented that

the employees' skills were sufficient. They made the following suggestions for other single parent/homem ers receiving future training: the need to improve interviewing skills, stress management skills and the ability to separate personal and professional issues at work.

Hopkinsville, Kentucky - The employers in Hopkinsville had hired single parent/homemakers to perform the following jobs: licensed practical nurse, postal clerk, computer lab assistant and secretary/billing clerk. There were only four employers interviewed at this site. The strengths of employees mentioned by the employers included: cooperation, good work attitudes, willingness to learn new things, follow-through and initiative. The needed skills for future employees included: assertiveness training, setting priorities, emphasizing work ethic, socialization skills and teamwork. Overall, the employers commented that there were no problems concerning child care or transportation. One employer mentioned that on one occasion the employee experienced car problems, and the company sent someone to bring her to work.

Maysville, Kentucky - The employers in Maysville had hired single parent/homemakers to perform the following jobs: adult dependent care worker, food service worker, employment clerk, baker's helper and retail sales clerk. The employers noted the following strengths: worked well with the public, knew what to expect on the job, were eager and willing to work and maintained a good rapport with clients. Recommendations for future training included: focus on interpersonal skills training, role play situations for conflict management, spelling, mathematics and notetaking. No significant industry was represented; therefore, the jobs available were mostly from small offices or privately owned businesses.

Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky - The employers in Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky hired single parent/homemakers to perform the following jobs: secretary, accounting clerk, library clerk, secretary and order/intake clerk. The employers spoke well of the employees and named the following strengths of the employees: very conscientious, eager to work, thorough, accurate, knew how to dress appropriately, cooperative and willing to learn. The two employers who referred employees for counseling were both from this area. Two of the employers did note that phone calls and tardiness had been problems. The needed skills requested for future employees included: understanding of the business environment, including the knowledge that work is not a place to bring personal problems, the need to plan for sufficient day care in case of emergencies, more self-confidence and adjusting from being at home to being at work.

Owensboro, Kentucky - The employers in Owensboro hired single parent/homemakers to perform the following jobs: accounting clerk, retail/factory worker, machine operator, janitor, receptionist, clerical worker, housekeeper, maintenance worker, mental health center care worker and secretary.

Six employers were interviewed. Four of the employers had some formal orientation. The strengths listed by the employers of the employees included: strong math skills, filing skills, computer skills and secretarial and word processing skills. Further, they listed the following worker characteristics: maturity, independence, motivation and honesty. The employers at this site listed many more job skills as strengths than employers from other sites. The suggestions for future training included: keeping personal life separate from work life, dressing appropriately, and perfecting interviewing skills.

It must be noted that many of the centers employed more than one person. Often skills listed were not characterizing one particular person, but an overview of employees hired through the specific training center.

Further, the Owensboro site was the only site where employers were interviewed who had hired non-traditional workers.

Discussion

The Survey

The major finding from the survey was that employers have a very positive impression of the employees they hire from the single parent/homemaker programs around the state. Most employees were rated "average" or "above average" on all dimensions in the survey, and many, especially those working for privately owned and operated agencies, had received raises. Most importantly, almost all employers said they would hire a single parent/homemaker participant again.

It must be pointed out, however, that this positive picture could be partially an artifact of the situation. Of the 345 single parent/homemaker participants who were placed in jobs during the last two years, only 99 responded to the letter from the NKU ReEntry Center, and only 87 gave permission for their employers to be surveyed. Although some of the remaining participants may have just never received their letters and perhaps would have given permission if they had, others may not have responded or may have refused permission for fear of negative evaluations. Perhaps they did not trust the procedures for anonymity, or perhaps they feared a negative evaluation would reflect poorly on the program. There is no way to know their reasoning. Yet, if the people who did not respond or did not give permission were, in fact, inferior employees, the results presented here could be presenting the situation in an overly-positive light.

Still, there was some differentiation in the ratings of the various work-related characteristics. Attitude, cooperativeness, appearance, and punctuality were generally rated higher than written expression, oral expression, prior skills and training, and reading ability. This suggests that some single parent/homemaker programs may want to take steps to improve their skills component.

There were also differences in the ratings of the employees who were no longer with their organizations versus those who were. The former were rated more negatively, particularly on dimensions such as attitude, responsibility, and initiatve. The following generalizations may be applicable when considering the employee who is no longer employed by the survey respondent. First, it may be easier to give a negative rating to an employee one no longer sees. Second, employers may have feared that if they gave negative ratings to current employees, these employees would be contacted by the single parent/homemaker program and this could cause problems at work. Or third, these employees may have truly had poorer work-related attitudes. If the last possibility is indeed the case--if it is the employee's general attitude that is related to the termination of employment--then this is something that single parent/homemaker training programs may want to target. It may be argued that this is not relevant, since most employees who left, either quit or were only hired on a temporary basis. Yet, some of those who quit may have quit because they knew they were not well-regarded by their employers (in two cases, employers noted on the survey, that the employee was asked to quit); and some of those who were only hired temporarily might have been kept on permanently had their attitudes, job skills or job keeping skills been more satisfactory to the employer.

Qualitative Interview

The employers were extremely cooperative and were very generous in providing their time and answering the interview questions. In terms of their knowledge concerning the centers, they felt that they knew enough about the center to be interested in hiring employees and indicated that they did not need further information. Two employers who had attended open houses were very pleased with what they had learned about the centers and four employers who had been guest speakers felt that this had been a valuable experience. One employer expressed a desire to visit the local center and contribute in some way to the training process.

It was a concern of the researchers that possibly the employers would need more or less information about the single parent/homemaker before hiring took place. This did not seem to be the case. The majority of the employers were satisfied with the type and quantity of information they received about potential employees, and the only point that was specifically made concerned the use of the term "displaced homemaker." Three of the employers indicated that this term had negative connotations which were not justified when they interviewed, and subsequently hired the employee.

When asked about transitional problems, the employers indicated that there were very few problems, if any, and those who noted problems, maintained that they were easily resolved. Direct communication between the employer and employee often provided a solution.

The employers did not find the single parent/homemakers to be any different from other employees except that they had more strengths and were better prepared for employment. Only two employers had negative comments and

those dealt with personal aspects concerning lack of concentration because of a personal situation and lack of self-assurance.

Child care and transportation problems were not the norm for this population of employees, and those employers who reported problems (only eight did so) indicated that old cars were one source of transportation difficulties. Child care problems were reported for two employees, and the employers recommended counseling to alleviate these problems.

The strengths of the employees were numerous and the employers were overwhelmingly adamant about their satisfaction with these employees. Although employers offered areas that could have been improved, they had very positive comments to make about the employees which they had hired. In comparing the number of strengths which were specific job skills and those which were worker characteristics applicable to any employment situation, it was of interest to note that employers listed many more worker characteristics than job skills. This reflected that employers were satisfied with the job skills, but felt that even more important were the worker characteristics needed for any type of employment.

It was indicated that the formal orientation or job training taking place upon employment was very limited. Although fifty percent of the employers were offering some form of orientation or training, these were all very brief and often consisted of only one to eight hours. The mentoring system was a unique idea in terms of lending support to the new employee. One employer particularly stressed that she wanted the new employee to take notes which could be referred to when needed. It should be noted that one franchise employer's training seemed much more thorough and well organized.

The majority of the employers did not anticipate problems with the employees even though many were aware that the single parent/homemakers were receiving training from centers which were government funded and addressed special needs of this population. This was a very positive response on the part of the employers. Further, after employment, they had not experienced problems which were directly applicable to this population.

The training suggestions provided by the employers were very broad in nature and also were categorized by job skills and worker characteristics. The majority of these comments did not focus on job skills, but instead were worker characteristics applicable to any work setting and provided important information to training centers. Three of the employers were adamant about the fact that single parent/homemakers must be aware that personal problems do not belong at work. They did not want employees to seek emotional support at work, and, as one employer stated, "She is utilizing my time, not hers and she is here to earn a living." Another employer indicated that there are enough conflicts at work without bringing personal conflicts to the job. Interestingly, only two employers had helped employees seek counseling for personal problems. Employee assistance programs could lend support to these employees without interferring with work duties and could ease the job conflicts mentioned.

Overall, the employers were very pleased with the training taking place at centers across the state. When asked for training suggestions the majority wanted to see more computer training for future employees. In terms of worker characteristics, they wanted a motivated employee who would understand the work ethic as the employer understood it. The sentiment shared among all of the employers was the need to hire someone <u>who wanted to</u>

work. The employers also viewed the training centers as a pre-screening service for potential employees, and one employer pointed out the time savings when working with a training center. She did not always have to publicly seek applicants since she could contact the training center and have the center personnel pre-screen applicants for her.

Employers seemed to appreciate the fact that center personnel were specific about the skills and abilities of the single parent/homemaker and they, in turn, could be clear about their expectations of the future employee. They stressed the fact that there was good communication between the center personnel and themselves. It was indicated by the employers that once they learned more about the centers and realized the backgrounds of the single parent/homemakers, they felt more socially responsible for hiring a candidate from the centers. None of the employers were aware that other centers existed throughout the state, and many expressed very positive regards for this type of training.

In terms of gender bias, there did not appear to be any. Gender was not an issue mentioned when hiring, and although a few employers referred to their female employees as girls, they did not express a negative attitude about hiring women opposed to men.

Although employers were not asked if they would hire another employee from the center in their areas, it was felt that this would be a strong possibility due to the positive interaction between the employer and the center personnel. Overall, the interviews were very positive and extremely helpful in gaining qualitative data for this study.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the researchers felt that the employers provided very thorough information, and the response rate for written surveys returned was excellent. It was hoped that more past single parent/homemaker participants would respond when asked to provide their permission for their employers to be contacted, but there are many reasons why they may not have felt safe in doing so. The qualitative data gathered through one-on-one interviews was an excellent addition to this study and the researchers felt that this method of gathering data would be most useful for future statewide studies.

1. Overall, employers rated the single parent/homemaker graduates as having the necessary skills to perform their job duties well. Additionally, the employers made excellent recommendations for the training of future program participants.
2. As a whole, the single parent/homemaker employees were able to make appropriate transitions from a non-paid working status to paid employment.

   Particular exceptions were noted and described. The employers did express that transitional problems were alleviated once the employee was made aware of the problem.
3. The employers did not view the single parent/homemaker as any different than other employees who had been hired.
4. In the written survey results, employers spoke more highly of worker characteristics such as attitude, motivation, and flexibility than of actual job skills of the single parent/homemaker employees.
5. In the qualitative interviews, employers listed worker characteristics more often as strengths than job skills.

6. It is important to note that this study surveyed employers who had hired single parent/homemakers who had been trained at both urban and rural centers throughout the state.
7. Another important note is that employers were not aware that other training centers of this nature existed in other parts of the state. Once becoming aware of this, they appeared to have a keener interest in utilizing the services of their local centers.
8. Employers considered the centers to be excellent resources in locating pre-screened potential employees.

Future research projects might examine the employers' perceptions concerning the differences between employees' job skills and the worker characteristics which are applicable to all employment settings. Since we know that employers rated single parent/homemaker employees more positively on worker characteristics, it would be helpful to examine job skills more closely and improve training in those areas. It should be noted that employers repeatedly stated that the employees have excellent worker characteristics such as attitude, motivation and flexibility. However, often improvement was needed in job skills when employers were asked if the skills were sufficient for the job. Therefore, researching employers' specific worker needs may be another avenue for future study. Additionally, this study indicates a possible positive impact on job training by having individual employers become directly involved in the training process. One site could be used as a model project and the results could have positive implications for all training centers throughout the state.

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Appendix A

date

address

Dear greeting :

I am writing to provide information about the employer perception grant which was funded for 1989-90. Bettie Tipton would like us to survey employers who have hired our participants to obtain their perceptions of the participants' skills.

In an effort to provide confidentiality and obtain thorough information, we are going to great lengths to contact past participants to receive their permission to contact their employers. We will be surveying up to 500 employers to gather information concerning the quality of our training programs. The following steps will be followed to obtain this data.

1. We will need an information sheet on every participant that you placed in employment during 1987-88 and 1988-89. Copies of the information sheet are provided.

2. We will write the participant to obtain written permission to contact their employers.

3. We will send the survey to the employer with a copy of the written permission slip from the participant. They may then return the survey anonymously.

4. We will study the results and provide you with a report concerning the employer's perceptions of the participant's skills.

5. We will also be interviewing some employers across the state to gather more qualitative data. We will work with the project directors at six specific sites to determine which employers will be interviewed.

As you may know, we had talked earlier about asking the project directors to conduct a random sample of past participants. This process is rather tedious and we would like to save you that step. Therefore, by providing us with the information sheets, we can sample a larger population and provide more thorough information after studying the results of the surveys.

We will need the information sheets on your 1987-88 and 1988-89 participants by March 16, 1990. Should you have questions about the information sheets, please call me at (606) 572-5595. I very much appreciate your help with this project and feel that we will obtain valuable information which will enhance the quality of all training, throughout Kentucky.

Sincerely,

Angie Taylor, Associate Director

Name

Dear :

Thank you so much for all of your efforts in getting the participant information sheets to us. We realize the amount of work this required and we appreciate your help very much.

During Spring break we mailed letters to your past participants asking for their permission to contact their employers. We have received many permission slips providing permission and employers are receiving the surveys.

We look forward to analyzing the data from the surveys and providing you with a thorough report concerning employer's perceptions of all of our training programs.

Thank You again for your assistance and dedication to quality training. You have made our research project a reality and we appreciate your team work.

Sincerely,

Angela Taylor, Associate Director
ReEntry Center

date

address

Dear greeting :

Thank you for participating in the qualitative research portion of the Employer Perception Grant through Northern Kentucky University. Your comments were insightful and provided us with valuable information. Only through the cooperation and openness that you offered can we improve the quality of training and make it match the needs of employers.

A total of 30 employers have contributed to this project. By the end of the summer we will send you the research results which will include your comments.

Again, we appreciate your assistance.

Most sincerely,

Patricia C. Borne
ReEntry Center

date

address

Dear greeting :

Many thanks for the help you and and your associates provided arranging the company and agency interviews for the Employer Perception Research Grant. Each interviewee was cooperative and offered excellent insights for our research. In addition, they all spoke very highly of your program.

We are anxious to learn the outcome of the interviews and how this information can help our respective programs. Thank you again for your time and energy to help us achieve our goals.

Most sincerely,

Patricia C. Borne

Appendix B

EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS GRANT

2 years of Data

10 Sites	Letters mailed	Response	Permission
NKU Field Test	19	08	07
N K U	95	24	21
Madisonville	11	08	08
Hazard	16	05	05
Ashland	27	08	06
Somerset	20	05	04
Hopkinsville	50	09	04
Maysville	16	06	06
Owensboro	51	19	19
Henderson	39	07	07
Prestonsburg	01	0	0
Total	345	99	87
Second mailing	225		

Response from permission letters 29% (99 of 345)

Yes Permissions 25% (87 of 345)

Employer surveys 87 mailed out 69 returns 79%

Appendix C

date

address

Dear greeting :

Hi, my name is Angie Taylor, and I'm the associate director of the ReEntry Center at Northern Kentucky University. I'm currently working on a project to help improve the quality of single parent/homemaker training programs across the state. Pam Stewart from Maysville Community College is working with me on this project. She gave me your name and suggested that you might be able to help us.

We are interested in finding out how employers feel about our training programs. To gain that information, we need to contact employers who have hired our graduates and ask them some questions. Here are some examples:

How was this employee's resume?	Better than average Average Worse than average
Compared to other employees whom you have hired for the same or similar work, how does this employee rank in terms of <u>dependability</u>?	Better than average Average Worse than average
How could this employee have been better prepared for the job?	

Before we contact your employer, though, we would like to have your permission. After receiving your permission, we will ask your employer to respond <u>anonymously</u> to a written survey. In other words, his or her name will not appear on the completed survey. Also, <u>your name</u> will not appear on the completed survey. Although, of course we will mention your name in the cover letter to your employer (otherwise he or she wouldn't know who to answer the questions about!), your name will <u>not</u> appear on the completed survey that is returned to us. Thus, we will have no way of linking completed surveys to specific individuals.

And indeed, our interest is not in learning how one particular employer feels about one particular employee, but in learning how employers feel about our graduates in general. This knowledge can be used to improve our programs and to make future graduates even better prepared for their jobs.

Enclosed is a yellow permission slip and a stamped envelope. Please fill out the slip and return it in the enclosed envelope as soon as possible. Thanks so much! We really appreciate your help.

Sincerely,

Angie Taylor, Associate Director
ReEntry Center

P.S. If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to call me at (606) 572-6361 or (606) 572-5595. Thanks again for your help!

Appendix D

date

address

Dear greeting :

Evaluation and research have become a major focus of training programs in Kentucky. As Associate Director of the ReEntry Center at Northern Kentucky University, I am currently coordinating a statewide project designed to learn how satisfied employers are with employees hired from Single Parent/Homemaker Programs. The results of this project will help us improve the quality of our programs so that future employees we train will be even better prepared for their jobs.

It is our understanding that within the past two years you hired 1st , who was trained through the Single Parent/Homemaker Program in 2nd , Kentucky. We would appreciate it if 3rd immediate supervisor could complete the attached survey about 3rd performance. We would like the supervisor to do this even if 4th is no longer employed with your organization. After the survey is completed, please return it in the enclosed envelope.

Please note that neither the survey respondent's name nor the employee's name will appear on the completed survey. Thus, when analyzing the data, we can assure anonymity which will protect your company and the employee.

As stated above, we want to use this information to improve the quality of our programs and to enhance the job readiness skills of the future employees we train. If you have questions about the survey, or the project in general, please call (606) 572-5595. Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Angela Taylor, Associate Director
ReEntry Center

Enclosures

P. S. Enclosed is a copy of your employee's permission for this infonnation.

PERMISSION FORM

I give my permission for the Northern Kentucky University ReEntry Center to contact my employer. I understand that my name and the name of my employer will not be on the portion of the survey which is returned to the ReEntry Center for analysis. I further understand that the results of the surveys will be used to improve the quality of training provided by single parent/homemaker projects throughout the state of Kentucky.

Name: _____
(Please sign you name on the above line)

_____
(Please print your name on this line)

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Phone:

Are you currently working for the same employer who hired you after your training? (Please circle one)

Yes No

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE WITH THIS PROJECT. WE APPRECIATE YOUR HELP VERY MUCH.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Employer Survey

(to be completed by the employee's immediate supervisor)

1. How many people does your company employ? ____
   - ___ Fewer than 25 (check one)
   - ___ 25 - 49
   - ___ 50 - 99
   - ___ 100 - 499
   - ___ 500 or more

2. Which of the following best describes your company or organization? ____
   - ___ Privately owned and operated
   - ___ Government funded and operated (school, government agency)

3. Is the person whose name appeared on the introductory letter still working for you? ____
   - ___ Yes (If so, please skip to question 6)
   - ___ No

4. If the person is not still employed with you, how many months did he/she work there? ____
   - _____ months

5. Why is the employee no longer there? ____
   - ___ quit
   - ___ on leave of absence (health, maternity/paternity leave)
   - ___ was laid off
   - ___ was fired
   - ___ was only hired on a temporary basis

6. Since coming to your company, has this employee been promoted? (Or if the employee is no longer with the company, was he/she promoted while working there?) ____
   - ___ Yes
   - ___ No

7. Since coming to your company, has this employee received a raise? (Or, did he/she receive a raise while there?) ____
   - ___ Yes
   - ___ No

Please answer each of the following questions by checking one of the three response categories. If you feel that a question is not applicable to this employee or that you do not have enough information to answer the question, you may omit that item.

Compared to other employees whom you have hired to do the same or similar work, how does (or did) this employee rank in terms of:

	Better than Average	Average	Worse than Average	
8. Prior Skills and Training				____
9. Dependability				____
10. Attitude toward the job				____
11. Appearance (Neatness, appropriateness)				____
12. Ability to learn				____
13. Punctuality				____
14. Cooperativeness				____
15. Ability to handle constructive criticism				____
16. Absenteeism				____
17. Ability to get along with supervisor				____
18. Ability to get along with other employees				____
19. Oral expression				____
20. Written expression				____
21. Reading ability				____
22. Listening ability				____
23. Productivity				____
24. Quality of work				____
25. Tact & Diplomacy				____
26. Emotional Maturity, Stability				____
27. Initiative				____
28. Responsibility				____

29. How was this employee's resume?
    ___ Better than average (check one) ___
    ___ Average
    ___ Worse than average

30. How could the resume have been improved?

31. How was this employee's interview? ___
    ___ Better than average
    ___ Average
    ___ Worse than average

32. How could the interview have been improved?

33. How could this employee have been better prepared for the job? What skills and training were lacking?

34. If an appropriate position became available, would you hire a person from this employee's training program again? ___
    ___ Yes
    ___ No

35. Any other comments?

Thank you very much for your help!

Please return to: ReEntry Center
Northern Kentucky University
Highland Heights, KY 41076

Appendix F

QUESTIONS ASKED AT EACH INTERVIEW

1. What do you know about these types of training programs and what are your perceptions of them.

2. What do you wish the trainers had told you about the person you hired that might have made the employee's transition easier?

3. Did the employee experience any transitional problems as the employee moved from training to work?

4. Do you see your employee from the training center as any different from other employees, either in skills or attitude? If so, in what way?

5. Did this employee have any child care or transportation problems?

6. Were the skills the new employee had sufficient? Was added training needed?

7. Can you identify the strengths of a person who goes through a program like this?

8. Was there any formal orientation to the job?

9. Did you expect any problems, and did you have any that you would relate to the new employee's background?

10. What could training programs do to improve the quality of training currently being offered?

Table 1
Descriptive Data on Companies and Employees

Company/Agency Size (Number of Employees)	
Fewer than 25	33.8%
25 - 49	4.4%
50 - 99	14.7%
100 - 499	30.9%
500 or more	16.2%
Company/Agency Type	
Privately Owned and Operated	72.7%
Government Funded and Operated	27.3%
Status of Employee	
Still Employed	73.5%
No Longer Employed	26.5%
Average Time Employed	8.9 months
Reason No Longer Employed	
Quit[a]	56.3%
Leave of Absence	6.3%
Fired	12.5%
Temporary	25.0%
Received Promotion[b]	
Yes	29.2%
No	70.8%
Received Raise	
Yes	78.8%
No	21.2%

[a] In two cases employers noted that the person was requested to resign.

[b] Promotion and Raise data include employees no longer working for the organization.

Table 2
Evaluation of Employees Hired from Single Parent/Homemaker Programs
In Comparison to Other Employees Hired to Do Same or Similar Work

	Better than Average	Average	Worse than Average
Prior Skills and Training	28.8%	65.2%	6.1%
Dependability	61.2	31.3	7.5
Attitude Toward the Job	67.2	28.4	4.5
Appearance (Neatness, Appropriateness)	65.7	31.3	3.0
Ability to Learn	59.1	36.4	4.5
Punctuality	64.2	29.9	6.0
Cooperativeness	63.6	34.8	1.5
Ability to Handle Constructive Criticism	39.4	48.5	12.1
Absenteeism	50.0	37.9	12.1
Ability to Get Along with Supervisor	58.2	38.8	3.0
Ability to Get Along with Other Employees	53.7	41.8	4.5
Oral Expression	31.8	60.6	7.6
Written Expression	27.9	65.6	6.6
Reading Ability	38.7	59.7	1.6
Listening Ability	46.0	47.6	6.3
Productivity	53.0	40.9	6.1
Quality of Work	53.0	37.9	9.1
Tact & Diplomacy	40.0	50.8	9.2
Emotional Maturity, Stability	46.2	40.0	13.8
Initiative	46.2	46.2	7.7
Responsiblity	53.0	37.9	9.1

Table 3
Comparative Evaluations by Employee Status for Selected[a] Characteristics

	Better than Average	Average	Worse than Average
Attitude Toward the Job			
Still Employed[b] (n = 49)	75.51%	24.49%	0.00%
No Longer Employed (n = 18)	44.44	38.89	16.67
Written Expression			
Still Employed	36.36	61.36	2.27
No Longer Employed	5.88	76.47	17.65
Emotional Maturity, Stability			
Still Employed	50.00	43.75	6.25
No Longer Employed	35.29	29.41	35.29
Initiative			
Still Employed	54.17	45.83	0.00
No Longer Employed	23.53	47.06	29.41
Responsibility			
Still Employed	57.14	42.86	0.00
No Longer Employed	41.18	23.53	35.29

[a] These five items yielded the strongest statistical effects.

[b] "Still employed" and "no longer employed" mean with the organization that first hired them after their single parent/homemaker training program.